TO:       Members of the Faculty
FROM:    The Committee on the Undergraduate Program (CUP)
DATE:     October 14, 1992
SUBJECT:  Resolution enabling minors in disciplines other than HASS

OVERVIEW
The resolution being proposed is intended to augment the HASS minor proposal of 1987 by providing a broad mandate that permits minors to be offered by all Schools of MIT, subject to restrictions discussed in this document. (The 1987 resolution authorized minor programs in HASS areas to be offered by the School of Humanities and Social Science and by the School of Architecture and Planning.) The resolution proposed here is intended to allow (but in no way to require) departments to develop minor programs without having to take each such proposal to the Faculty for separate approval. In addition, CUP is proposing a set of procedural and conceptual guidelines that would allow the development of minor programs in an orderly, consistent manner, so that the Faculty may articulate general policies and procedures without having to review the details of each program.

BACKGROUND: THE HASS MINOR
In the spring of 1987, the MIT Faculty approved a resolution to permit undergraduates to minor in HASS fields. That minor was intended to respond primarily to two needs. The first was the need “expressed...by persons within the School of Engineering for an experience in humanities, arts, or social science which is more structured and more serious than that which most engineering undergraduates now have.” The second need, expressed by some faculty in the School of Humanities and Social Science, was “for a larger constituency within the undergraduate engineering student body; a constituency of students with a serious commitment to education in humanities, arts, or social science.”
During the academic year 1991-2, the Committee on the Undergraduate Program devoted several sessions to a review of the HASS minor program in order to evaluate its responsiveness to these needs. From the viewpoint of the School of Humanities and Social Science (SHSS), the program has been a marked success. It is popular both with students (approximately one out of five seniors now graduates with a HASS minor) and with HASS faculty, who feel that the program has served to raise the level of commitment and achievement among a significant minority of undergraduates. This favorable evaluation is shared by many faculty from Schools other than SHSS, who feel that the minor program has indeed provided many undergraduates with a “more structured and more serious” experience in HASS disciplines. These benefits have been obtained at relatively low cost in administrative overhead. CUP has therefore concluded that the HASS minor has responded efficiently and effectively to the needs it was intended to address.

PROPOSALS FOR MINORS IN FIELDS OTHER THAN HASS

The HASS minor proposal of 1987 “deliberately [did] not deal with the general proposition of minors across Schools for MIT undergraduates,” including minors in non-HASS disciplines in the School of Architecture and Planning. It explicitly stated, however, that adoption of this minor “would not in any way preclude consideration of minors which may be proposed by other Schools.” During the past year, a Minors-in-Science Committee, appointed by Dean of Science Robert Birgeneau and chaired by Professor Gene Brown, developed a proposal for minors in each of its five departments. This proposal, endorsed by Dean Birgeneau, was brought to CUP with the request that it be presented to the Faculty.

Other Schools have indicated interest in formulating minors programs in the near future. In particular, the Engineering Council has expressed its support for a broadly-based minors resolution that would permit departments in the School of Engineering to develop minor programs.

REASONS FOR EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES TO MINOR

The proposal to allow all Schools at MIT to offer minor programs is intended to provide students and faculty with the following benefits:

- For students, it would provide public recognition of focused work in a second discipline that is not sufficiently recognized when presented only as a list of subjects on the transcript. Many students here, in connection with their major field, already take close to the equivalent of a minor in a related field; for example, chemical engineering students take many chemistry subjects, and physics students may take many mathematics subjects. Students perceive it to be beneficial to have this work recognized in the form of a minor program designated on their transcript and/or diploma.
• The availability of a minor will allow students more flexibility in choosing a major field, because the student’s focused effort in a field can be highlighted by its designation as a minor. For example, students who wish to attend medical school, but who are not sure they want to major in biology, would now have the option of minoring in biology. The availability of additional minors may therefore help to reduce pace and pressure by permitting an attractive alternative to double-majoring.

• Students will be guided by the development of intellectually coherent programs that provide significant experience in a discipline. Many students now take several uncoordinated subjects in a field in which they have interest. The institution of a more structured minor program, which sets out an orderly sequence of studies, would give them a more rigorous and focused experience. HASS faculty have cited such increased clarity and direction as a distinct benefit of the HASS minor program.

• Faculty in departments offering minors will gain the attention and commitment of students who are not majoring in that department, but who identify with the department and its discipline.

ISSUES RAISED AT CUP

CUP has also discussed the potential liabilities of a broader minors program. The concern most frequently raised has been the prospect of increasing pace and pressure on MIT students. Although new minors may reduce the pressure to overload for some students by providing an attractive alternative to double-majoring, for other students the minors may encourage more overloading. In contrast to the existing HASS minor, which requires only a few subjects beyond existing General Institute Requirements in HASS, new minor programs would generally require a greater additional time commitment on the part of the student.

After debating this subject, CUP has concluded that there exist several effective safeguards against inordinately stiff demands on students by a minor program. First, the Committee on Curricula (COC) will review all proposals in light of CUP guidelines. Second, a limit has been set which is lower than that for double majors.

As long as minor programs are optional, these safeguards should suffice. The principle of choice must be vigorously upheld; no department should require, whether explicitly or implicitly, that its majors complete a minor. Also, CUP proposes that students be limited to no more than two minors. Under this rule, students are able to receive recognition for their work in different disciplines; to take an obvious example, students will be able to list a minor in a HASS discipline as well as a minor in a scientific one. By limiting minors to two, on the other hand, we are trying to keep
students from overloading and from constricting their schedules primarily to lengthen the list of minors on their transcripts. Also, allowing unlimited minors would present problems of administration.

CUP is well aware that good administration is crucial to the success of a broader minors program. Departments and Schools must dedicate sufficient resources to administering the program, so that accurate information on students working toward and completing a minor is provided to the Registrar in a timely fashion. The department should designate a Minor Advisor or Advisors to answer students’ questions about the program and assist with administration. The School should coordinate the reporting of departmental minors and should otherwise provide general oversight. The experience of the HASS minor provides a valuable guide to the level and type of administrative resources that other departments and Schools are expected to provide.

INTERDISCIPLINARY MINORS

The 1987 proposal for a HASS minor stated that departments, sections, or programs “would propose a structured program in a designated area of concentration,” adding that “it is expected that the areas or concentration designated as suitable for a HASS Minor would normally be selected from those areas in which a student may elect to major.” Finally, the resolution stipulated that all proposals would be reviewed by the Committee on the HASS Minor and would be submitted to the Committee on Curricula.

Most HASS minors are in fact “selected from those areas in which a student may elect a major.” A number of HASS minors, however, are offered in areas where there is at present no major: examples are the HASS minors in Psychology and in Film and Media Studies, as well as the newly created Regional Studies minors. In all cases, the subjects required for such interdisciplinary minors are well-established offerings in languages, humanities, the arts, social studies, and history. As stipulated in the 1987 proposal, these minors are structured programs that have been thoroughly reviewed by the Committee on the HASS Minor and by the Committee on Curricula.

CUP does not feel it is wise, however, to give general authorization for further interdisciplinary minors. We do not intend to discourage proposals for such minors. On the contrary, CUP has reviewed and encouraged a proposed minor in education, which would be linked to a teacher’s certification program. We also welcome the prospect of a minor in environmental studies. However, we recognize that the development of such minors might present a number of complexities. Such minors would likely require the development of new subjects; they would possibly not be based in existing departments or programs; and there might not be an existing mechanism for review comparable to the Committee on the HASS Minor.
CUP has concluded that it would prefer to evaluate separately each future proposal for minors in areas where there is not an existing major. Groups that develop such proposals are encouraged to bring them to CUP for early review and comment. After development, final proposals for non-major-related minors should be approved by CUP in consultation with the Committee on Curricula. Any proposal that appears to be a significant departure from the terms of minors authorized by the 1987 HASS resolution and by this resolution will be brought to the Faculty Policy Committee (FPC), and, at the FPC’s discretion, to the Faculty as a whole. This mechanism is intended to be rigorous enough to discourage the proliferation of non-major-related minors, without being an obstruction to such minors as have intellectual merit and coherence. We are convinced that it is in the ultimate interest of the sponsors of such minors to have such case-by-case review and broad Faculty discussion.

The 1987 resolution which provided for minors in HASS remains in force. The following general criteria are intended to apply both to HASS minors and to minors that might be proposed under this resolution:
GUIDELINES FOR APPROVAL OF MINORS IN ALL SCHOOLS

The Committee on Curricula should consider the following criteria in evaluating proposals for a minor program in areas where there already exists a major program:

• A student may not take a minor in the area of his or her major(s).

• No student may earn more than a total of two minors.

• The proposed list of subjects satisfying the minor should be an intellectually coherent program in a discipline.

• The minor would normally include a program of six subjects (five or seven with the approval of COC).

• Subjects satisfying the General Institute Requirements may be included in a minor program providing they are part of a coherent program of study.

• No department, section, or program may require its students to complete a minor.

• Any department, section, or program may develop a minor, subject to review by the School.

• The department, section, or program offering the minor, as well as the School, must dedicate sufficient resources to administering the program, so that students receive adequate advice about the program, and so that an accurate list of students completing the minor is provided to the Registrar in timely fashion.

• The junior/senior P/D/F option may not be used in a minor program.

• At the discretion of the department, section, or program, transfer credits may be used to fulfill a portion of a minor program. MIT subjects (including those taken at Wellesley College and Harvard University through cross-registration) must comprise at least half of any minor program. COC may consider exceptions in specific minor programs for credit earned through study abroad.

• Minors can be awarded only at the same time the student receives the SB degree, and must be associated with a specific degree.

• The minor program should be designated no later than Add Date one full term before the term in which the student expects to receive the SB degree. Students expecting to graduate in June 1993 will be permitted to designate an approved minor program no later than Add Date of spring term 1993.
The following resolution enables minors to be offered in disciplines other than HASS:

RESOLUTION

Resolved: That the Faculty agrees that the Schools of Architecture and Planning, Engineering, Management, Science, and the Whitaker College of Health Sciences and Technology may offer minors in disciplines in which they presently offer majors; and that a student may elect a minor by completing a program of study developed, offered, and supervised by a department, reviewed by the School, and approved by the Committee on Curricula. The Faculty further requests that the Registrar take the actions necessary to enable designation of the degree with a minor or minors in the disciplines so approved.
Committee on the Undergraduate Program
14 October 1992